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ABSTRACT

Throughout her lifetime Frances Evelyn Maynard Greville, the Countess of Warwick, contributed considerable energy and financial support to improving the education of poor and rural children, women, and laborers. Among her accomplishments were the establishment of a school for handicapped girls and a secondary agricultural and technical school for the children of farm workers. She drew attention to the need for education of women both through her role as chairperson of the educational subsection of the Women's Work Section of the Victoria Era Exhibition and through her support of Studley College for women. The countess also organized public support for a government bill to raise the age of British compulsory schooling. Following World War I, the Countess devoted her resources to organizing a summer school for elementary teachers and establishing a college for laborers. (LP)

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PREPARATION FOR LIFE
THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK AND BRITISH EDUCATION

A Paper Presented to the
Southwestern Social Science Association

by
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PREPARATION FOR LIFE
THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK AND BRITISH EDUCATION

Frances Evelyn Maynard Greville, Countess of Warwick, was one of the Edwardian Age's most distinctive figures. Today she is usually remembered only as Edward's beautiful, wealthy, and aristocratic mistress, but her historical importance lies far less in her notorious love affairs than in her many and varied efforts to aid humanity. At the time of her marriage in 1881 to Lord Brooke, who succeeded his father as Earl of Warwick in 1893, she was the wealthiest heiress in England, with an estate producing an annual income of about £30,000. When she died in 1938 she left an estate with a gross value of only £37,100.¹ The loss of her fortune was not the result of her vaunted extravagance (which in reality was no greater than that of many contemporaries), but was rather evidence of her generous humanitarian nature. Throughout her life she spent freely to help others, and despite the drain on her resources she declared in her memoirs, "I don't regret any of my giving."²

This great compassion and concern for others motivated Lady Warwick's life. Her continuous efforts to improve the general condition of mankind ranged over a variety of subjects, including Poor Law reform, the Invalid Children's Aid Association, the Salvation Army, trade unionism, and socialism. Her greatest influence, however, was in the field of education.

Her interest in education arose from her sense of com-

passion. Throughout her life, Lady Warwick held the belief that poor and rural children and unmarried women faced a severe handicap which only better education could alleviate. In her memoirs she noted that she had entered the political arena in order "to break down the conditions that cause poverty and privation, chief of which I consider to be a lack of education."³ Eventually she came to believe that socialism was the answer, because it would "by education, by decent environment and gradual uplift, . . . evolve a people above the squalor to be found today."⁴ But most of her educational work was done before she became a strong socialist, and although egalitarian it was non-socialist in nature.

Another of her basic tenets was that the individual should be educated into his place in society and not out of it.⁵ Since her primary concern as a large landholder was with farm labor, most of her educational work centered around agriculture. She was also concerned with the position of women in society, and these two interests would combine most effectively in the creation of Studley Agricultural College for Women at the turn of the century.

Her first venture into education, however, came a decade earlier, and like much of her later work it was technical rather than intellectual in nature. In 1890 as Lady Brooke she started a school at Easton Lodge, her Essex estate, to teach sewing skills to local girls who were handicapped or too delicate for farm work. Beginning with one teacher and a few girls in a room at the Lodge, by the end of 1891 there were two teachers and

thirty students in a special school Lady Brooke had built in Easton Park. The girls sewed fine lingerie, which Lady Brooke sold to her Society friends to help pay some of the school's expenses. To meet the increasing demand for her students' work, she soon opened Lady Brooke's Depot for the Easton School of Needlework in Bond Street. In 1898 the growing number of applicants for admission to the school led to the establishment of more workrooms and the acquisition of a house for boarding students. By then, several of her graduates were earning £1 per week and even more--and this at a time when general servants received only 1s. per week.⁶

The year before this expansion, Lady Warwick had begun a far larger project. Concerned by the lack of secondary education available to the children of farm workers in Essex, she wrote of the agricultural laborer: "Education, elementary and technical, is what he now needs to teach him to improve his position."⁷ In November 1896, she met Professor Raphael Meldola, who shared her interest in technical education. Together they established a secondary technical and agricultural school at Bigods Hall on the Easton estate near Dunmow. Opening in February 1897 with two students,⁸ the school expanded rapidly that summer to twenty-three pupils.⁹

Following the marked success of the first year, a garden and farm were set up in the summer of 1898 for the use of the pupils. Lady Warwick also provided a boarding house with room for fifty boys and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen. By 1902 there were about forty of these residents and over thirty

day students. A coeducational boarding school was a radical innovation for a conservative rural district, and the fees of six guineas per year for day students and thirty guineas for boarders made it even more difficult to convince parents that their children (especially girls) should continue their education after the mandatory age of twelve. But despite such deterrents, Bigods filled a long ignored need and attracted students from all over East Anglia.¹⁰

Professor Meldola had designed a four-year curriculum to provide the customary continuation school education as well as special instruction in those subjects of greatest value to the future farmers and farm wives who made up the student body. The first two years were devoted to the usual humanities courses--grammar, geography, history, literature, and French or German--plus fifteen hours a week of science--chemistry, physics, botany, and biology. Boys also received manual instruction in wood and metal work, while girls studied domestic economy. The final two years again included the basic humanities and extensive work in mathematics as well as the other sciences, but the major emphasis was more on agricultural and industrial training. Working their own small farm plots provided the students with laboratory experience, as did managing the dairy, poultry runs, and apiary. The most modern equipment and methods available were used and taught, in keeping with Lady Warwick's belief that British agriculture was conspicuously bad because British farmers clung to outmoded and inefficient machinery and techniques. She emphasized training for boys in the use of various ferti-

lizers, new hybrids, scientific livestock management, and other modern agricultural techniques. The girls learned to operate a dairy equipped with the latest machinery while studying the scientific side of modern dairy-farming in classroom and laboratory.¹¹

Lady Warwick hoped that once the school was functioning public authorities would be willing to take over its operations, since it was the only technical school in the region. She was disappointed, therefore, when the Education Committee of the Hertfordshire County Council limited its support to the establishment of several scholarships.¹² After considerable delay, the London Board of Education provided an annual grant of £113, while the Essex County Council came up with £100 per year.¹³ These amounts were mere tokens of support--Lady Warwick's friends donated far larger sums privately (William Waldorf Astor, for instance, sent her £1000¹⁴). Despite these various grants and donations--and the tuition charges--Bigods Hall still ran an annual deficit of £1000, which had to be made up by the Countess.¹⁵

The year 1897 saw Lady Warwick involved in many other educational projects besides Bigods. She was asked to read a paper in June at the International Congress on Technical Education hosted by the Society of Arts in London.¹⁶ Her paper dealt with the problems of technical education in rural areas, and covered many of the ideas and issues she was in the process of handling at Bigods that summer. Although the subject was technical education, she placed considerable emphasis on the necessity of combining it with basic scholastic studies. She noted that in rural districts the only secondary education available

was usually provided by continuation schools which used county funds. This was contrary to the law, however, for it prohibited their use of such funds for the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic. To deal with this and other problems of administration, she suggested with a touch of irony that the future would see a "rational system of education" where the various forms of schools would no longer operate at cross-purposes under a multitude of separate authorities. The remainder of her paper dealt with the more specific question of technical instruction for girls, a category in which she included cooking, nursing, laundry work, and dressmaking. Since the purpose of technical education was to prepare the individual for his role in life, and since most women would become wives and mothers, instruction in the domestic skills would be of the greatest benefit to them and to the nation. In the discussion that followed, her paper was highly praised for its thoroughness, and the general wish was expressed that educational authorities might show the intelligence to implement her suggestions.¹⁷

In January 1897, Lady Warwick had accepted the chairmanship of the Education sub-section of the Women's Work Section of the Victorian Era Exhibition, which opened in May and ran through the summer. The secretary of the sub-section, and Lady Warwick's confidential secretary for the duration of the Exhibition, was Edith Bradley, a noted feminist who had organized the Women Lecturers' Association in 1892. Together they assembled a large exhibit on women's education, but the main thrust of the sub-section was a series of Saturday conferences on women's work

and a three-day congress, held on July 12-14, on education in the Empire. Lady Warwick chaired the conference on Poor Law Schools and took part in the third day of the congress, which concerned agricultural training. After the Exhibition ended, the Countess decided that the papers and records of the discussions should be published. In her role as editor, she wrote a brief preface and paid the costs of publication; Miss Bradley, as sub-editor, did the actual work of assembling the volume.¹⁸

Lady Warwick saw education as the most effective means of improving the position of women in society, and accordingly availed herself of the opportunity provided by the Exhibition to express her views publicly on the future of women's education. Although she believed universities would inevitably open up their degrees to women, she also felt that women should advance "step by step and make sure of our ground as we go along." Women should be thankful for the progress made so far in the Victorian Era, but should not relax their efforts "to place women in their true position in the educational world."¹⁹

Her basic view was that education should be aimed at the development of "trained capacity," which would always be in demand regardless of sex.²⁰ At the end of the last day of the congress, she declared that the morning session had "shown very decidedly that the one thing to do is to train and to organize, so that in the days to come--in those good days that are coming for women--there may be no question of difference of efficiency in trained and skilled labour between men and women."²¹ Her decision to put this idea into action eventually resulted in the

establishment of Studley College.

Using the discussions on women in agriculture as a base, she developed Lady Warwick's Agricultural Scheme for Women, which she published in December. Her plan called for the establishment of agricultural settlements of "unmarrying women," who would work the land in pairs while running the settlement as a cooperative. To train them in agriculture and horticulture, Lady Warwick decided to start a women's college.²²

The Agricultural Scheme never came to fruition, but by February 1898 the Countess had Edith Bradley searching for a suitable agricultural college, one that would be agreeable to the attachment of a women's hostel. After rejecting several possibilities, in May Lady Warwick settled on the Oxford University Extension College at Reading. By the end of the summer, she had purchased a house and garden large enough for fifty boarders. When the school term began in October, the Lady Warwick Hostel had twelve students. Her insistence on accepting only "gentlewomen" made it difficult to recruit students and raise funds. The £50 tuition and board was too high for many of the applicants to meet on their own, and neither the public nor independent foundations were interested in establishing scholarships to educate "gentlewomen." Lady Warwick hoped to raise £2000 by public subscription to help make up the initial capital outlay, but by December she had received only £855.²³

The hostel was, nevertheless, meeting a demand, and the number of students rapidly increased to the point where two more

houses had to be opened in 1899. Miss Bradley, who served as warden, was largely responsible for this success, but she credited Lady Warwick--"No one will ever know as well as I do the time and thought and money which Her Ladyship has spent in this work."²⁴

By the end of the first two years, about two hundred students had enrolled in the hostel and twenty-five had already found employment. Four houses had been added to the original, but as enrollment increased relations with Reading College deteriorated. Finally, Lady Warwick decided that if the school was to operate successfully it had to be made independent of other institutions.²⁵

With this in mind, she made a public appeal for funds, but received pledges for only £600. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1902 she purchased Studley Castle in Warwickshire, paying £25,000 out of her own pocket. After renovating the castle and grounds, Lady Warwick announced the move in March 1903. In the five years at Reading, the Lady Warwick Hostel had trained 225 students with only £1500 from outside contributions--Lady Warwick had paid the rest of the expenses.²⁶

Studley College consisted of the castle and 350 acres of land (compared to the hostel's twenty acres). In addition to the fields, there were large gardens and extensive greenhouses, as well as a dairy fitted with the most modern equipment. The school year consisted of three thirteen week terms, and students were urged to remain for two years. Tuition was increased to a range of £80 to £100--the extra £20 assuring the

student of a "steady bedroom." In 1904 there were forty-three students, although the castle could accomodate up to fifty-five.²⁷

Even though the college was not operating at full capacity, its success was well-established. Studley students won the Royal Horticultural Society gold medal seven years in a row, and graduates had little difficulty in securing important positions. A 1905 listing of past students showed three running their own farms, two serving as head gardeners on large estates, five lecturing or teaching at various agricultural schools (including Studley), and one who had recently left the position of dairy manager of the British Dairy Institute, Reading, only to be succeeded by another Studley graduate.²⁸

Despite this success, serious problems had arisen. Burdened with the increased operating costs of the college, Lady Warwick tried desperately to obtain funding from one government board after another, but although each assured her of its support, none was willing to provide money. In an attempt to hold costs down, the Warwick Estates agent was placed in charge of the college's finances. His economizing created continual friction with Miss Bradley, who was also becoming estranged from Lady Warwick. The Countess had not attended a meeting of the Studley College Executive Committee since early in 1904, because of her growing involvement in the socialist movement. Later that year she joined the Social Democratic Federation, England's most staunchly Marxist party. In August 1905 the problems at Studley came to a head when Miss Bradley resigned, taking all but

two members of the staff with her. The resignations were accepted at an Executive Committee meeting on September 9, but no reason for her action was recorded. Lady Warwick merely wrote to the Times that "changes deemed necessary by myself and the committee have been made."²⁹ A new staff and warden were hired, and Studley continued its successful but financially troubled existence.³⁰

Although they were the most important, Bigods and Studley were only part of Lady Warwick's educational activities during these years. In 1899 she led local agitation in support of a government bill raising the age for compulsory schooling from eleven to twelve.³¹ When a 1900 court decision ended local school board aid to secondary and scientific/technical schools, the government introduced the Education Bill of 1901 as an expedient measure to prevent the closure of all such schools. Trade unions and other working-class organizations viewed the bill as totally inadequate and campaigned against it. Lady Warwick, already deeply involved in union affairs, made numerous speeches in opposition to the bill, and in July wrote an article on its shortcomings for the Nineteenth Century. The Education Bill, she asserted, ignored "the real obstacles to educational reform, and leaves all the urgent questions of education untouched."³² The following year, the government took a major step forward by enacting the more comprehensive Education Act of 1902, but Lady Warwick considered it equally inadequate. "It is disappointing," she wrote, "to find that while dealing much with machinery, the Bill says very little about that for which the machinery is intended--Education."³³

In September 1904, shortly after the Countess joined the Social Democratic Federation, it launched a major publicity campaign advocating that the state provide free meals to all students in state supported schools. Lady Warwick plunged into the campaign, traveling around England with a small group speaking and visiting schools and hospitals. She also wrote a major article for the Fortnightly Review, then expanded it into a book. Although she used logic and precise statistics to counter every objection to such state action, she did not ignore the more emotional aspects of the issue. One of her basic points was that "it is exactly the poorly fed, ill clad, and therefore imperfectly educated children of today who become the ignorant, stupid, slovenly parents of tomorrow."³⁴ As a result of the public pressure generated by this campaign, the new Liberal government passed the Education Act of 1906, also known as the Provision of Meals Act.³⁵

Lady Warwick's pleasure at the success of this campaign was offset by problems at Bigods. Refusing to stretch their regulations any longer, the London School Board withdrew its grant in 1904, claiming that Bigods did not qualify as a secondary school. Encouraged by this action, the Essex County Council cut off its grant in 1906. Lady Warwick and Professor Meldola angrily protested, backed by noted educators and justified by the School Board's own admission that Bigods was the only school in "this part of the country" to provide a suitable technical education. In the summer of 1907, the Essex Education Committee agreed to restore their grant, but hamstrung it with many reser-

vations and conditions. Even that was too late. Bigods closed abruptly in the last week of August, just before the new term was to begin. Lady Warwick had always hoped to turn over operation of the school to the public sector, but the loss of the grants (despite the promise of one's partial restoration) indicated that this would never happen. She could no longer afford the expense of keeping the school open. Although she did not reveal it at the time, she had recently been forced to sell some of her Easton property to pay an insistent creditor. The £1000 she spent on Bigods each year now represented about one-sixth of her drastically reduced income, and she had many other charities and projects dependent on her support.³⁶

Studley also continued to be a heavy financial burden, and in early 1906 Lady Warwick had raised the issue of reducing her personal involvement on the grounds that a college should not be tied too closely to any one individual. A plan was prepared placing the college under a board of trustees, and a twenty-one year lease was drawn up, at the end of which the trustees would have the option of renewing the lease or buying the property. Various difficulties delayed the implementation of these plans, but although for a time it appeared that the college would also have to close for lack of money, the change-over was finally made in March 1909. In 1929 the Warwick Estates sold the property to the college for £12,000--£13,000 less than the Countess had paid for the unimproved property in 1903.³⁷ The curriculum and the success of the college remained unchanged under the new system. In the early days of World War

I, Lady Warwick noted proudly that every pupil at Studley had a position waiting for her, and the college had a large backlog of job offers.³⁸

The war further radicalized the Countess and intensified her belief in the vital necessity of education for everyone. She observed that the education of the wealthy was costly and ineffective, while that of the poor, "obligatory and free, is worth what it costs."³⁹ The education of the poor suffered because schools were supported by local taxes and poorer districts (which tended to be rural) could not collect enough taxes to run their schools properly. The cost of education, she insisted, should be a national, not a local, responsibility.⁴⁰

In the post-war years Lady Warwick continued to support educational projects, two in particular. From 1920 to 1937 an annual week-long summer school for elementary teachers was held at Easton under the sponsorship of the Dunmow and District Teachers' Fellowship, of which she was president.⁴¹ The second project was an effort to convert Easton Lodge into a college for the benefit of labor. After months of negotiations, the Trade Union Congress accepted her offer, but before it could be put into effect, the General Strike of 1926 impoverished the TUC and it had to cancel the project for lack of funds.⁴²

The failure of her plans for Easton marked the end of Lady Warwick's direct connection with educational affairs. Of her many projects and plans, only Studley College survived her. The rest fell along the way as her financial resources dwindled and short-sighted politicians refused to assume the public bur-

dens she had been carrying. The Countess was involved in many more projects than mentioned here, and there is more than a kernel of truth in Anita Leslie's comment that she "invented the welfare state--and tried to run it out of her own purse!"⁴³ In the end, that proved impossible, but she remained the eternal optimist. In her second volume of memoirs, she expressed her hopes for the future. Foremost among them were three reforms she had long urged to little avail--"better education for the rural child, improved school buildings, the abolition of the Parish school in favour of a State-run Educational Institution."⁴⁴ She and her contemporaries might have failed to achieve these goals, but she was firmly convinced of their inevitability.

NOTES

- ¹Times (London), August 20, 1938, p. 13, col. 3.
- ²Frances, Countess of Warwick, Life's Ebb and Flow (New York: William Morrow, 1929), p. 234.
- ³Frances, Countess of Warwick, Afterthoughts (London: Cassell, 1931), p. xiii.
- ⁴Frances, Countess of Warwick, "Why I Am a Socialist," Century Magazine, 117 (August 1926), 448.
- ⁵Times, January 18, 1899, p. 10, col. 2.
- ⁶Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 275-276, 281-285; Margaret Blunden, The Countess of Warwick: A Biography (London: Cassell, 1967), pp. 79-80.
- ⁷From Lady Warwick's introduction to the memoirs of Joseph Arch, which she edited in 1897. Quoted in Warwick, Ebb and Flow, p. 148.
- ⁸Frances, Countess of Warwick, "Technical Education in Rural Districts," Journal of the Society of Arts, 45 (August 6, 1897), 964.
- ⁹Blunden, p. 117.
- ¹⁰Warwick, Ebb and Flow, p. 287; Letter from Lady Warwick to W. T. Stead, undated (July-August, 1898), quoted in Warwick, Ebb and Flow, p. 128.
- ¹¹Frances, Countess of Warwick, "Bigods," The Nineteenth Century, 50 (December 1901), 984-987; Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 287-288.
- ¹²Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 288-289.
- ¹³Blunden, pp. 140, 195.
- ¹⁴Warwick, Afterthoughts, p. 114.
- ¹⁵Warwick, Ebb and Flow, p. 290.
- ¹⁶Times, June 19, 1897, p. 9, col. 5.
- ¹⁷Warwick, "Technical Education," pp. 956-964.
- ¹⁸Frances, Countess of Warwick, ed., Edith Bradley, sub-ed., Progress in Women's Education in the British Empire: Being the Report of the Education Section, Victorian Era Exhibition, 1897 (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1898), pp. xi-xii, xv-xvi,

1, 33, 175, and passim; Times, June 29, 1897, p. 16, col. 3; Blunden, pp. 119, 121.

¹⁹Warwick, Progress in Women's Education, p. xiv.

²⁰Ibid., p. xiii.

²¹Ibid., p. 175.

²²Blunden, p. 120.

²³Blunden, pp. 122, 137; Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 128-129.

²⁴Blunden, pp. 138-139.

²⁵Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 299-300.

²⁶Blunden, pp. 139, 160, 163-164, 200.

²⁷Hugh Spender, "Lady Warwick's Farming College for Girls," Century Magazine, 70 (August 1905), 551-553.

²⁸Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 300, 303-304.

²⁹Times, September 11, 1905, p. 9, col. 4.

³⁰Blunden, pp. 186-187.

³¹Ibid., pp. 140-141.

³²Frances, Countess of Warwick, "The Cause of the Children," The Nineteenth Century, 50 (July 1901), 67-76 (quotation is from p. 75).

³³Quoted in Anita Leslie, The Marlborough House Set (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 147.

³⁴Frances, Countess of Warwick, "Physical Deterioration," Fortnightly Review, 85 (March 1906), 504-515 (quotation is from p. 505).

³⁵Blunden, pp. 183-185; Warwick, Afterthoughts, p. 233; Warwick, Ebb and Flow, pp. 276-278.

³⁶Blunden, pp. 195-199; Times, April 30, 1907, p. 2, col. 6; August 3, 1907, p. 15, col. 2; August 28, 1907, p. 5, col. 5.

³⁷Blunden, p. 200.

³⁸Frances, Countess of Warwick, A Woman and the War (New York: George H. Doran, 1916; London: Chapman & Halls, 1916), p. 96.

³⁹Ibid., p. 177.

⁴⁰Warwick, Ebb and Flow, p. 289.

⁴¹Blunden, pp. 270-271; Times, August 10, 1923, p. 13, col. 4.

⁴²Blunden, pp. 290-305; Times, March 9, 1925, p. 9, col. 3; January 28, 1926, p. 11, col. 2; February 26, 1926, p. 9, col. 4; December 31, 1926, p. 12, col. 1.

⁴³Leslie, pp. 157.

⁴⁴Warwick, Afterthoughts, p. xiv.

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